

September 7, 1983

I learn from the daily press that petitions are being circulated and a resolution will be presented to this Council to rename High Street in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I ask that this Council reject this resolution if and when it is presented.

Renaming a street for memorial purposes is attractive and popular because it is cheap. It costs the sponsors and petitioners nothing and entails no sacrifice on their part. All they have to do is put names on a piece of paper.

By contrast, renaming High Street will deprive the City of Newark of an important part of its history. The street was so named by the City's founders because it was the high street that overlooked the City down to the Passaic River. Furthermore, the cheap publicity sought by sponsors of this name change would be gained at the expense and inconvenience of the residents, businesses and agencies on this street, and at the cost to the City of making all necessary changes in signs and records.

We already have an eminently appropriate memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School where we hope children are learning the principles of equality of all persons in a free, democratic society.

My opposition to this change is based solely on my conviction that, as far as possible the original topography and street names of the City should be preserved. I realize that, because of emotional aspects of this proposed change, sponsors may allege that any opposition is a derogation of Dr. King and a lack of concern for the principles for which he stood. I offer only one personal reference to refute such charges.

In 1947, thirty-six years ago, I was one of two men who were responsible for the inclusion in the new New Jersey Constitution, the provisions that abolished segregated schools and forbade discrimination based on race, creed, color, or national origin, in all public employment and in all places of public accommodation.

How many of those who are pressing for this change by merely putting their names on a piece of paper, would give money to provide a real memorial worthy of this great man? Could this not be a granite monument, suitably inscribed, placed in a small plot where school children would plant and lovingly care for flowers and small shrubs? Would not this be a true memorial, pleasing the eye and lifting the spirit of all who pass by? For such a memorial, I would give all I could afford. Surely, the City or the County would dedicate a small amount of land.

Let us enhance the city's image rather than destroy part of its history. Again I ask that you reject any proposal to change the name of High Street.


D. J. Henderson